

The Honey and the Hatchet

by Miss Pookamonga

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Summary: We all know from the Dragons television series that Hiccup and Astrid have an interesting, if not strong, bond with each other. But what goes on behind the scenes? A series of interconnected oneshots chronicling Hiccup and Astrid's relationship as it develops through each episode of the show. Rated T for some language and mildly suggestive themes. HICCSTRID, OF COURSE!

1. How to Start A Dragon Academy

**Dear Readers,**

**OHAI ! LONG TIME NO SEE! Really, it's been forever, and honestly, I don't have a good excuse for having retreated into lurker mode for the past two - yes, TWO - years. TWO YEARS since I've actually written and posted anything. I bet my followers thought I'd died - did you think I died? I was just being lazy. Really, really lazy. Plus life is annoying and doesn't leave much time for me to write fanfic anymore, which sucks. SO I'M SORRY I DISAPPEARED. BUT I'M BACK NOW, OKAY?! And I'm so happy I am. You have no idea how refreshing it was to finally get back into the swing of writing fanfic again. I'm so happy I feel like throwing a party. Yay! And I owe it all to the HTTYD franchise for being so addictive and plotbunny-inducing and turning me into a keyboard-happy fangirl again. **

**I could say more about "OMG SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED EHRMAGERSH TWO YEARS OF HIATUS WHAT IS MY LIFE" but I won't waste your time. Basically, I've been re-watching ****Riders of Berk_ since buying the DVD sets (obsessed much?), _and since this is the only month I'm off from acting school this year, I actually had time to start writing the RoB Hiccstrid_ _fanfic I've been wanting to write since the series first premiered. And since the HTTYD 2 teaser is now out, plus the aged-up designs of Hiccup and Astrid, I've been on an HTTYD/Hiccstrid high for the last month and my lazy self finally decided to stop being lazy and actually write. Each "chapter" is

going to be a oneshot based off each episode of __RoB, focusing specifically on Hiccup and Astrid. Despite the fact that I love the TV series to death, one thing that's been bothering me about it is the ambiguity surrounding Hiccup and Astrid's relationship - sometimes they act like they're together, and sometimes they don't - and I wanted to try and find a way to logically work through that episode-by-episode. So while each oneshot will technically be able to stand alone, there will be some elements that will unfold chronologically and connect the oneshots together (hopefully you'll see what I mean once I write more). The show seems to be trying to develop the Hiccstrid relationship more slowly rather than jumping straight into something romantic like we initially assumed would happen at the end of the first movie, so the progression of these ficlets is going to reflect that gradual development (so be patient - they'll get all lovey-dovey with each other eventually :P). _

>

Anyway, if you're a TL;DR kind of person, then I'll just finish my shpiel here and let you read the story. Honestly, I had no idea this first installment was going to be this long. For some reason when I write, stuff just spontaneously starts overflowing onto my keyboard. Yay me. Well...that's it for now. I hope you like it! ENJOY!

Best regards,

Pooka

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><p>The Honey and the Hatchet

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><p>I. How to Start A Dragon Academy

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><p>Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III was excited. More than excited, in fact. He was ecstatic. Bursting at the seams. Thrilled, overjoyed, euphoric, on cloud nine " he was practically trembling with every synonym for "excitement" one could think of. His father had granted him and his friends permission to start a _dragon training academy_. Even after the defeat of the Red Death, Hiccup never imagined that Stoick the Vast's newfound acceptance of the dragons as fellow citizens of Berk would lead to something like this. A _training _academy for dragons and riders alike on the island that had once held one of the most notorious reputations for dragon-slaughtering among all the Viking tribes. He could hardly believe it. And his father, who had previously never trusted Hiccup with any potentially dangerous responsibility for fear of his son's imminent injury or death, had inaugurated _him _as the academy's headmaster.

It was almost too much for Hiccup to take in at one time.

Of course, earlier that day, before the whole village, he'd done an excellent job of masking just exactly _how_ excited he was. An entire childhood's worth of conditioning himself to publicly suppress any

emotion that could be construed as un-Viking-like wasn't going to disappear overnight. But now that the impromptu celebration for the academy's installation was over (the Vikings had a knack for finding excuses to drink extra mead) and Hiccup and Toothless were finally alone in the comfort of their own room, the young man could barely contain himself any longer.

"Can you believe it, bud? Our own training academy!" Hiccup let out a whoop of delight and hobbled awkwardly around the floor in an attempt at a victory dance. "This is gonna be _amazing_!"

Toothless observed his companion's odd flailing and noise-making with amusement and satisfaction. He wasn't quite sure what an "academy" was, but whatever it was, it was making his boy exceptionally happy. And anything that made Hiccup _this_ happy gave the Night Fury good enough reason to feel the same. Besides, watching the young Viking twirl around his room in such a ridiculous fashion was rather entertaining.

"There are so many things to do, so much stuff to think of â€" oh I have _got_ to start planning!" cried Hiccup, leaping onto his bed. "Lessons, equipment â€" but I can't now. I'm just soooâ€"gah!" He thrust his arms out on either side of him and flopped down on top of his blanket. Then, after a few seconds, his torso shot upright again. His green eyes were open wide and nearly wild with glee.

Toothless pricked his ears up in curiosity.

"Hey, do you wanna go for a ride?!" Hiccup half-squealed. He jumped off his bed and bounced up to his friend in a joyful frenzy. "Let's go for a ride! There's no way I can sleep now anyway. Come on!" He began hopping around the room again, his prosthetic clinking happily with every step.

The Night Fury furrowed his brow at the sudden request as he remembered the slumbering chief downstairs. Toothless did not understand everything the humans did or said, but one thing he had come to understand very well in the past few months was that the big-bearded one was _not_ in favor of his son parading around Berk after midnight. The dragon gurgled firmly and glanced downward in response to Hiccup's eager face, hoping the boy would get the message.

"Oh, what? Dad? He sleeps like a rock! The only thing that would wake him up is a battle and we're definitely not going to do anything like that. Come _on_! I can't stay in here anymore! Let's fly!"

Toothless groaned and rolled his eyes. This was ludicrous. As much as the dragon wanted to share in his companion's excitement, it was the middle of the night, and the events of the day had made him fairly exhausted. Couldn't they go for a joyride in the morning? He was going to fall asleep soon anyway. The Viking with a bucket on his head had had the brilliant idea of letting the dragons share whatever that sweet liquid stuff was that the humans enjoyed drinking, and now the after-effects were finally catching up with the Night Fury's body.

"Aw man, come on, Toothless! Just one little ride! Please? I can't sleep!"

Toothless warbled disapprovingly and yawned. His head was starting to swim. Next time the Vikings threw a party, he was definitely not going to drink a whole barrellful of that liquid, no matter how good it tasted.

"Ugh, really?" moaned Hiccup, disappointed. "Fine, I'll just have to find something else to do with myself â€" oh! I know!"

The Night Fury lifted his head. Now what?

"Don't wake Dad, whatever you do. I'll be back. I just have to â€" umph!" Hiccup hoisted himself up on his windowsill from his bed and pushed the shutter open. "Are you sure you don't wanna come?"

Toothless huffed and laid his head down again. He hoped Hiccup wasn't going to get himself into any trouble. The dragon wasn't looking forward to having his sleep interrupted by a midnight rescue attempt.

"Okay, whatever, but you're missing out!" Hiccup called, before disappearing onto the roof.

* * *

><p>Knock-knock. Knock-knock. Knock-knock-knock.

Astrid Hofferson stirred in her sleep. She was currently dreaming of something rather pleasant that in broad daylight she would never admit to anyone, and the strange knocking sound was starting to become a nuisance.

"Go away," she mumbled drowsily. "I'm busy."

Squeeeaaak.

"I said gooo."

CRASH!

In a split second, Astrid bolted out of bed and flung herself in the direction of the noise, which happened to be a now overturned table beneath her window. Even more of her belongings clattered to the floor. There was a moment of confused shuffling, scraping, clanging, and wrestling before an all-too familiar voice cried out and stopped Astrid's arm mid-punch.

"ASTRID! IT'S ME!"

Astrid froze and blinked a few times, squinting her eyes in the darkness to see whom she'd pinned to the floor. "H-Hiccup?!"

He grinned sheepishly at her. "Hi."

She landed her punch in Hiccup's arm, causing him to yelp loudly in pain. "How did you â€" what the Hel are you doing in my room?!"

"Y'know, if you don't want boys sneaking in here in the middle of the night, you should think about locking your windâ€" OWW!"

She'd punched him again.

"You didn't answer my question!"

"Okay, okay! I just came over to see youâ€"that's all! Let me go!"

Astrid relaxed her grip on Hiccup's arm but didn't release it.
"That's it?"

The russet-haired boy winced at the pain in his arm. "Yes."

"In the middle of the night." The blonde scowled at him.

"Look-I-couldn't-sleep-and-Toothless-wouldn't-go-f
or-a-ride-and-I-needed-to-get-out-so-I-came-to-see
-you-and-I-couldn't-exactly-knock-on-your-front-do
or-because-it's-midnight-andâ€"

"Astrid?"

"Oh, shit, it's my mother â€" _hide_!" Astrid hissed, grabbing Hiccup and shoving him towards her bed. He managed to crawl beneath it just as the door creaked open.

A blonde Viking woman with bleary blue eyes poked her head through the doorframe. "Astrid? Are you alright?"

"Yeah, Mom, I'm fine," Astrid answered, flashing her mother an innocent smile. "I was justâ€|getting a drink of water and I bumped into the table."

"Oh, alright," Mrs. Hofferson replied. "Just be more careful, dear." And with that, Astrid's mother closed the door.

After several moments of waiting to be sure her mother had gone back to sleep, Astrid motioned for Hiccup to come out from under the bed. He crawled out, still wincing because of his arm â€" Astrid had punched him _twice_, after all â€" and slowly stood up.

"Well, that was close," he quipped with a grin, trying to ease the awkward silence. Astrid glared.

"Are you crazy? What the _Hel_ do you think you're doing sneaking into _my room_ in the middle of the night â€" I didn't even think you were up to sneaking into girls' rooms in the first place!"

"Hey, you can never underestimate what a guy is capablâ€"OUCH! Stop _doing_ that!"

Astrid crossed her arms and glared at the boy even more fiercely. "I think I have a right to punch you as much as I want. I'm feeling kind of violated right now, if you _haven't noticed_."

Hiccup frowned quizzically and opened his mouth to ask what she meant when it suddenly dawned on him. Wow, was he stupid. He'd been so excited about the academy that changing into his nightclothes hadn't even occurred to him. But Astrid, who had most definitely not been up

prancing around her room like a drunken idiot, was dressed in nothing but a nightdress, and her hair was loose, cascading down her back and shoulders in soft golden waves. Speaking of which, the little slivers of moonlight peeking through her window shutter were casting a rather beautiful shine on those waves " and wow, her hair was a lot longer than Hiccup had realized, and when it was down it _really _framed her face well, and it especially made those blue eyes of hers pop"

"OWW!" Hiccup stumbled backward onto Astrid's bed at the impact of the kick. "What was that for?!"

"You were _staring_"

"Iâ€"uhâ€"I was not!"

"Yes, you were!" She kicked his good leg again for good measure, earning another pained "Oww!" from the dragon trainer. It was bad enough she'd been dreaming about making out with him seconds before he'd come crashing through her window. And now he was _right there in front of her _ogling her in her nightdress. Astrid's face flushed in embarrassment and she prayed to every god she could think of that he couldn't see how red her face was growing.

"Okay, I'm sorry I came â€" I just â€" I couldn't sleep, alright? And Toothless didn't want to go for a midnight flight." His eyes darted away â€" he was obviously now embarrassed too â€" and he rubbed the back of his head like he always did when he was nervous.

Astrid relaxed a bit as a grin crept onto her lips. Hiccup's awkwardness was too endearing for her to stay mad at him for long. "Why couldn't you sleep?"

At that, he turned his head back around to look at her, and his eyes lit up. "I was too excited. About the dragon training academy â€" oh, Astrid, it's gonna be awesome!" The night's previous joy suddenly seized him again and he jumped up from the bed. "I can't stop thinking about all the stuff we're gonna be able to do and my dad's actually putting me in charge of something andâ€" "

Hiccup continued rambling on and on, _skipping _around Astrid's room, as the girl watched him in awe. She'd never seen Hiccup this excited and unable to keep still. His face was beaming so brightly that it could have rivaled the sun â€" _that _she had seen before, but not coupled with this hyperactive hop-dance-arm-flailing thing he was currently doing. He looked like a happy little bunny. It was absolutely adorable, and Astrid couldn't help but let her grin widen at the sight. He was being so unbearably _cute_, and she just wanted to grab him and kiss him right there and then andâ€" _no_. She was _not _going to indulge that train of thought again. She really had to curb her habit of spontaneously kissing him â€" they weren't even going out. Well, not officially anyway. Ever since the fight with the Red Death, the pair had spent a substantial amount of time together and had grown to be very closeâ€"albeit competitiveâ€"friends. Which would have been fine and dandy the way it was if Hiccup didn't have a knack for being so awkwardly lovable and Astrid hadn't developed random urges to kiss him at his most adorable moments. But as it was, Hiccup wouldn't stop being, well, _himself_, and Astrid had let a few kisses slip because she just couldn't restrain herself. Not that he ever complained. But in the back of her mind, Astrid knew this

undefined friendship-with-occasional-lip-locking was going to cause problems at some point and she simply had to keep herself from jumping on him and kissing him again. But gods, he was hopping around her room like a baby Nadder and his smile was making her stomach lurch in all kinds of ways she'd never considered, andâ€œ"

"Astrid!" Hiccup had suddenly grabbed hold of her hands.

"Whaâ€œ"what?"

"Come with me."

She raised an eyebrow. "Where? And why?"

"I don't know!" He squeezed her hands and Astrid's stomach did a little back flip. "Somewhere. Let's celebrate. Our own training academy!"

"Hiccup, if you've forgotten, the whole village just spent half the day celebrating alreadyâ€œ"

"Yeah, butâ€œ|I can't sleep! I need to go somewhere. Let's go!"

"You want me to sneak out of my house in the middle of the night to go frolicking through Berk with you because ofâ€œ" Something dawned on her, and she suddenly frowned at him. "Speaking of sneaking out, you're going behind your father's back again, aren't you? He never lets you stay out this late!"

"So?"

"Sooo that's the third time this week! You just got granted the opportunity of a lifetime and you're going to risk pissing your dad off because you're too excited to sleep? What if he finds out and changes his mind? No more training academy for us!"

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "Come on, Astrid, he's not going to take the academy away from meâ€œ"usâ€œ"just over me sneaking out at night. We need the dragons trained anyway. And besides, the other two times I went behind his back this week were what got us the academy in the first place, remember?"

Astrid kicked him again.

"GODS, will you stop trying to maim me more than I already am?!"

"Hiccup, you do realize that sneaking into a girl's room at night, dancing around like a lunatic, and then begging her to sneak out with you to do Odin-knows-what is a bitâ€œ|_odd _for you?"

"Well, yeah, but I'mâ€œ"

"Excited," Astrid finished. "Yeah, yeah, I know." She paused, then her grin returned. The same part of her that wanted to kiss him was relishing the idea of sneaking around the island with him at night. Who knew when she'd get the opportunity to do this again? He'd never been like this before and there was no telling when he'd be like this

next. She might as well go along with this strange, hyper-excited version of Hiccup for the time being â€" it couldn't hurt, right? _Well, unless I "accidentally" kiss him again_, she thought, but his offer was too enticing. It was worth the risk of her losing her grip on herself for the umpteenth time.

Besides, she just couldn't say no to _that face_.

* * *

><p>An hour later found Astrid (in her day clothes that she'd shoed Hiccup out of her room to change into) lying atop a cliff overlooking the ocean. Hiccup lay next to her, finally having worn himself out. The pair had spent the last hour running, skipping, and jumping through the woods, hooting and hollering their throats hoarse. Hiccup had nearly tripped over many a tree root in the process, fallen flat on his face while attempting a cartwheel, and managed to crash straight into a bush full of rather confused Terrible Terrors who'd spent several minutes squawking indignantly at the Viking boy and trying to singe his hair. Astrid couldn't remember the last time she'd laughed so hard. She'd made a mental note to find and record every possible way to make Hiccup this exuberant again, because quite frankly, gallivanting through the forest with him in the middle of the night was a Hel of a lot of fun.<p>

"Wow."

The blonde Viking turned her head towards her friend. "What?"

Hiccup laughed. "I can't believe I just spent the last hour acting like a drunk pirate."

Astrid poked him in the shoulder. "Neither can I. You are _really_ excited."

"I dunno what's gotten into me."

Astrid rolled over onto her side and propped her head up on her hand. "Whatever it is, I like it."

Hiccup glanced up at her. "Ha, really?" He looked genuinely surprised. "I thought I might've scared you."

She smirked. "Me? Scared? Of _you_?"

"Oh, way to boost a man's confidence, Astrid," he deadpanned.

She slapped his arm playfully. "I'm _kidding_, you dork."

"I know, I know." He smiled and closed his eyes with a contented sigh.

Now that Hiccup wasn't looking at her, Astrid took the opportunity to stare at him. For the first time she noticed that his cheeks had lost some of their roundness and that his jaw line was starting to become sharper and more defined. She wasn't quite sure how she felt about that. On the one hand, she (especially the butterflies in her stomach) enjoyed imagining what he'd look like in a few years, after he'd have passed his yet-to-come growth spurt. But on the other hand, she adored the boyish innocence of Hiccup's features, and the thought

of him outgrowing them left a bit of an ache in her heart.

Without warning, Hiccup's eyes snapped open again, and he caught Astrid staring before she could divert her gaze. "What?"

Astrid's face flushed. If there was one thing about Hiccup's face that hadn't changed (and Astrid hoped never would), it was the vibrant emerald color of his eyes. Gazing at them for too long was a dangerous risk " every time she had allowed herself to get lost in those eyes she'd ended up kissing him.

"Astrid, you okay?"

Astrid coughed and quickly glanced away. "Yeah"fine. Tired." She hoped to Thor that once again that Hiccup would remain oblivious to the sudden redness in her cheeks.

"Hey, Astrid?"

Although she probably shouldn't have, Astrid locked eyes with him again. By Odin, he had beautiful eyes. Hypnotic, almost. "Yeah?"

His lips curled into a broad smile that sent Astrid's heart somersaulting into her throat. "Thanks for coming out here with me," he said softly, his voice almost a whisper.

She grinned. "I had fun," she whispered back. _Don't think about kissing him, don't think about kissing him, don't think about" _

Dammit. She was kissing him.

She _really _needed to learn how to control herself.

* * *

><p>The next morning, two drowsy Vikings " one with an axe strapped to her back and one with a metal foot on his left leg" arrived late to breakfast in the Great Hall.<p>

"Oh, look who's finally here," snickered Ruffnut with a wicked grin. "Were you guys"she wiggled her eyebrows suggestively" _up late?"

A second later, the twin was choking on a mouthful of Astrid's fist.

The first day of training went rather smoothly after that, and aside from several large yawns from two of the academy's members (and a large bruise on a third's lip), there was no indication that the previous night had been anything but ordinary.

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><p>AN: Soooo...how was my first foray into the land of fanfiction since two years ago? I hope Hiccup wasn't too OOC. I'm not exactly sure how I ended up writing him to be so hyperactive - as I said, when I write, stuff just seems to happen, and when I'm done I can't explain how it happened (LOL). Also, kudos to anyone who caught the teeny bit of foreshadowing of HTTYD 2! Along with that, there was

some foreshadowing of how Hiccup and Astrid's relationship will play out in later ficlets *cough*HeatherReport*cough* - so stay tuned! Thanks for reading, and please leave a review (constructive criticism is fine, but flames will be deleted). 'Til next time - fly high, faithful riders!
>

2. Viking for Hire

**Dear Readers,**

**OHAI AGAIN! Thanks so much for the views and reviews - to all of you who read/favorited and didn't leave a review, don't hesitate to, please! I love reading them! I'm happy the first part of this got a good reception, and I'm excited to continue. Unfortunately, since the second episode of RoB was practically devoid of any Hiccstrid moments, it was much harder to come up with something to write for it - hence the utter lameness/shortness of this oneshot. I hope it's sufficient enough to keep your interest (I promise the next oneshot will have way more Hiccstrid fluff!). Anyway, thanks again! I love you all!**

_**Best regards,
>_

**Pooka**

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><p>II. Viking for Hire

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><p>"What am I going to do?"<p>

They were sitting on the edge of one of the docks â€" Hiccup occasionally flinging a pebble out to sea and Astrid aimlessly stirring the water with her bare feet. After his father had presented him with the impossible task of well, to put it bluntly, _firing Gobber from the saddle project, Hiccup had been so distressed that he'd suddenly found himself wandering through the village searching for his blonde companion. He realized that he'd been doing that lately â€" seeking out Astrid whenever he had a problem he couldn't solve on his own. He couldn't even remember exactly when he had started going to her for advice. Why did he do it? He wasn't quite sure. It wasn't as if Astrid had built a reputation for being Berk's font of abundant wisdom â€" that was what Elder Gothi was for. Maybe he sought the solace of her company simply because she was the only person his age who really _listened_. Ever since they had become friends, the majority of their conversations about difficult situations like this had left him with peace of mind, even if Astrid never actually said anything particularly helpful. He couldn't figure out why, but the girl had an exceptional and inexplicable ability to calm him down during his most distraught moments, and because of that he found himself consistently being drawn to her presence.

"Got anything?"

Astrid sighed as she focused on the little ripples her toes were

tracing through the seawater. "Only what your dad said. It's better for you _and_ Gobber if you just tell him."

Hiccup groaned and knocked his prosthetic against the one of dock's wooden beams. "Butâ€|he'll be crushed. I _know_ he will. You should've heard him last night â€" he was _singing_. He never sings unless he's _really_ happy or excited, and now I have to rip that away from him? I can't do that."

Astrid glanced up at her friend's darkened expression and sighed again. "But you _have_ to. The longer you wait to break it to him, the more it'll hurt him when you do."

"Yeah, butâ€|you haven't seen his face when he looks let down. It'sâ€|it's awful. I hate it when he looks like that."

The blonde Viking reached out a hand and gently laid it on Hiccup's shoulder. Seeing him upset like this always left her with a hollow ache in her chest, but what could she do? "I wish there was something better I could tell you," she murmured wistfully.

Hiccup shrugged. "It's okay. I guess there isn't really anything else you _can_ say. I have to tell him and that's it."

Without realizing what she was doing, Astrid let her fingers trail down Hiccup's arm until they were wrapped comfortingly around his palm. "Do you want me to come with you when you go?"

He turned toward her, his voice laden with sadness but his eyes shining with a sliver of gratitude. "Thanks," he replied softly, "but I think I need to do this myself." He inadvertently gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

They sat in silence for a moment, hands joined, until Astrid finally broke the contact to grab her boots from behind her. "I'd better get to dinner now," she said apologetically, pulling her feet out of the water. "Mom doesn't like it if I'm late."

"Yeah, I'd better go too," Hiccup remarked, gathering his legs under him and pushing himself up into a standing position. "Umâ€|thanks."

Her eyes regarded him tenderly as she wiggled into her boots, and she flashed him a tiny smile. "Anytime, Hiccup."

* * *

><p>AN: Sorry to be so disappointing after how much everyone loved the first oneshot. I tried --. I like the idea of Hiccup regularly going to Astrid for advice/someone to vent to, though. He does it a few times in later episodes, so I figured he would have probably gone to talk to her during this whole incident with Gobber. The two of them seem to have a certain level of ease with each other when it comes to Hiccup talking about his problems - we even saw that in the first movie when Astrid goes to talk to him on the cliff after Stoick takes Toothless to the dragons' nest. And even if Astrid does joke around with him sometimes, she really is the only one of the group he's comfortable venting to. Despite the show's flaws, that really is a nice touch to their relationship :) **

3. Animal House

**Dear Readers,**

**Thank you SO much for all your reviews! They really do mean a lot! I apologize that I can't reply to them individually anymore, but as school is starting up full-swing I'm going to be so busy in the near future that among homework and work and writing this, I won't have time to spend to send you each a reply. But I want you all to know I am truly grateful! ::hugs:: **

**I am VERY sorry it took me so long to update this. For some reason this chapter gave me hell while I was writing it. At first I couldn't figure out how to go about writing the idea I had for this chapter. Then I had to completely re-write one section because it was awful, then I sort of got writer's block, then I was just exhausted from writing it and kept stopping because my brain was dead and - AUGH. Long story short, it was frustrating, and I really don't know why. I was actually super-excited to write this part because this episode had a good amount of Hiccstrid, but for some reason the story decided to be evil to me. Anyway, I hope this turned out almost as good as I wanted it to be. The first two parts are mostly introspective and go into more depth about Astrid's and Hiccup's thoughts about their relationship, so I truly hope that they aren't boring. But I feel they needed to be written to explain some things and to set up for later chapters. **

**Anyway, thanks so much for sticking with this and I hope you enjoy!**

**Best regards,**

**Pooka**

**PS: My friend KateMarie999 is working on a story about Hiccup and Astrid's daughter called "Fight or Flight," and she really wants to get more readers and reviewers. It's a really good story so please check it out (and I'm not just saying this because we're friends - it really is a good story)! We'd both really appreciate it! Thanks :) **

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><p>III. Animal House

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><p>Astrid Hofferson was frustrated.<p>

Her normal course of action when confronted with such frustration was to head out into the forest and give some poor innocent tree trunks a heavy beating with her axe. But seeing as the snowstorm had left the entire village covered and the forest virtually inaccessible, Astrid was stuck in the Great Hall, forced to find another outlet for her emotions.

She leaned against Stormfly's sleeping form with a sigh and surveyed the crowd gathered before her. She needed to find some way to get the feelings brewing inside her out of her system, but axe-throwing in a

building packed wall-to-wall with people and animals would definitely not go over well with anyone. What else could she do? It was probably too cold to go flying, and milking a yak in her state would only cause the yak pain and possibly earn her a kick to the face. Astrid crossed her arms and grumbled to herself. At least the twins were able to make constant use of each other as punching bags. And Hiccup had his notebook to scribble in whenever he needed to let off some steam.

Hiccup.

Ugh, her brain just had to call attention to him. Again.

The brunette was, of course, the very source of her frustration, as he so often seemed to be of late. The thing was, he hadn't even done anything to upset her. In fact, Astrid's feelings at the moment were more her fault than anyone else's. But the mere fact that Hiccup was somewhat involved in Astrid's current predicament made thinking about him exasperating to the point where the blonde felt the serious urge to throw something against the wall.

Damn that boy. Damn him, damn himâ€¦damn her.

She shouldn't be so worked up about this, she told herself. She was the one who had been promising herself for months to avoid giving in to any impulsive romantic action around him. Of course, she'd broken that promise several times already, but she was trying! She hadn't kissed him since that night they'd gone romping through the forest celebrating the inauguration of Berk Dragon Academy, and a few days ago, when the two of them had been nearly buried by the avalanche, she'd managed to resist kissing him again. She was doing better! She should be celebrating her victory!

So why did she feel like a pile of dragon dung?

Maybe because she was actually upset that she hadn't kissed him after the avalanche? That she had pushed him away? And that she had really wanted to kiss him?

Who was she kidding â€" of course she'd wanted to kiss him. She almost always wanted to kiss him now. She loved everything about him: his awkward clumsiness, his sarcasm, his sheepish attitude whenever he was in social situations, the contrasting way he handled himself so confidently around the dragons, the way he and Toothless seemed to seamlessly blend into one entity when they were flying, how his emerald eyes had a special look reserved just for her, how he was quick to defend her if someone tried to get under her skin, how easily his arms fit around her and how warm they felt when they were holding her against his bodyâ€"

Oh damn it all to Hel. She had it bad, she really did. There was no use denying it. So why was she constantly making all these efforts to combat what she was feeling? What was she afraid of? What was so hard about just walking up to him and saying, "Hey, I like you a lot; let's just cut the crap and go out already"? It wasn't as if he would reject her. She knew Hiccup was head-over-heels for her â€" everybody knew. He'd been in love with her since they'd been little kids. Never in a million years would Hiccup turn her down, so there was absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all. Yet whenever Astrid stopped to consider the prospect of voicing her feelings to

the only boy who had successfully managed to get her heart in a twist, an inexplicable sense of dread surged through her body and she pushed the idea away.

"Ugh," Astrid groaned. She seriously needed to get out of the Great Hall and destroy something or else she was going to drive herself insane. At this point, she didn't care how cold it was outside anymore.

"Come on, Stormfly, let's go for a ride." She nudged the sleeping Nadder beside her.

Stormfly wearily opened one eye, directed a scathing glare at her rider, and let out an angry grunt before promptly resuming her nap.

"Okay, _fine_, be that way!" Astrid hissed. She hastily donned her furs and stomped towards the door, cursing under her breath.

* * *

><p>"Astrid?"

"Over here! Hiccup, I'm freezing."

"Come here."

In the darkness he felt her slender body press against his, and instinctively his arms rose to wrap around her. She was shivering violently. Worried, he rubbed his hands across her back and pulled her closer. She tightened her grip around his shoulders and let out a shaky breath. A warmth that had little to do with her body heat began bubbling up from somewhere in his belly and seeped through his own body, sending tingles running up and down the length of his spine.

"Where are the dragons?"

_Suddenly, burst of white-blue light exploded above them, followed by a jet of orange flame. _

_"Toothless?" _

"Stormfly?"

_A couple more fire blasts burst into view above their heads, and suddenly, a few rays of sunlight began peeking through the ice. They blinked in surprise as the light flooded through the frozen barrier overhead, illuminating the space around them. _

_"Yeahâ€|" _

_ "I see daylight!" he cried._

_ "We're gonna get out of here!" She gasped with joy. He could feel her trembling against his chest._

_ "Look what they did," he breathed in awe, gazing up at the dragons. _

_ "They saved our lives." She turned her head towards him._

And all of a sudden, they were face-to-face, their noses just barely more than an inch apart.

_Almost immediately, he felt her body tense within his embrace, and she hastily made to tug away from him. But in daring split-second move that surprised him as much as it did her, he tightened his hold on her body, pulled her toward him, and captured her lips with his own. _

She squeaked. He was quite sure that the sound that escaped her throat was a squeak. He'd never heard her make a sound like that before, and for a moment it distracted him so much that he nearly let go of her. But then he felt her cold fingers move from his shoulder to toy with the hair just behind his ear. His stomach contorted into an impossible shape at the unexpected gesture and he pressed closer to her, tilting his head in the process. She squeaked again as his mouth moved gently against hers. Her lips were as frigid as the ice surrounding them, and chapped, but he didn't care - the touch of them sent delightful shock waves rippling through his body and he never wanted the sensation to stop. He briefly registered the feeling of her other hand clutching at his tunic as his own hands softly stroked her back. If he had had enough focus to describe the moment, he wouldn't have been able to other than to say that it was utter perfection. He'd never felt bliss like this before. He'd never been this close to her before. He wanted to stay frozen in this embrace forever and never let her go, never feel space between them again, never worry that she would push him away and leave him alone!

"AAACHOO!"

An abnormally loud sneeze jolted Hiccup out of his slumber. He jumped, startled, and blinked wildly, trying to get his bearings.

"Whaaaa! where am I? Ast! what's that?"

A familiar gurgle finally brought the boy to his senses. He sat up and turned around to find himself facing his trusty Night Fury, whom he had been using as a pillow for the last hour. Normally, the sight of Toothless' wide green eyes peering into his own would fill Hiccup with affectionate warmth, but right now all the boy felt was his stomach sinking down to his toes. Of course it had been a dream. Well, some of it had been a memory, but that last part had most definitely been a dream.

Why did it always have to be a dream?

Confused at his rider's gloomy demeanor, the Night Fury trilled questioningly and nudged Hiccup's shoulder. For a second, Hiccup remained still, unresponsive. Toothless nudged him again. This time, the boy lifted a hand to rub the dragon's nose distractedly and sighed.

"Chicken," he muttered to himself.

He really was chicken. If he wasn't, then he would've made a move by now. Any other Viking boy would kill (quite possibly literally)

to get the attention Astrid Hofferson gave him. The first flight with Toothless had changed everything: whereas before the two had barely spoken to each other, ever since then they had become practically inseparable. Whenever he was busy at the forge, she usually stopped by to pay him a visit and intently observe whatever project he happened to be working on. Sometimes he would instruct her on how to make improvements to her saddle or how to craft parts of various weapons, and she always ate up his lessons with surprising enthusiasm. She, in turn, had taken it upon herself to train him in the fine art of combat ("If you're going to be chief one day, at some point you're going to need to know how to fight without a dragon," was her argument). He still wasn't particularly decent when it came to fighting, but with Astrid's help he was (slowly) improving. If they had a need to vent or discuss something that was bothering them (other than their relationship), they would seek each other out and end up talking for hours. In fact, they often did that anyway even if there were no problems to discuss. When it came to venting, he normally talked more than she did, but he never minded; just having her there to listen to him was a comfort in itself. They regularly challenged each other to races on their dragons — flying, mostly, but when the conditions were right, they would go what he had dubbed "dragonboarding" down the mountain slopes of Berk. Even when they weren't racing they both came up with ways to playfully compete with each other without even realizing it. They constantly tried to outdo each other when it came to performing aerial tricks. They had a tendency to lapse into conversations made up entirely of witty banter that sent their friends' eyes rolling. When they weren't spending time with their dragons or at the academy, they were more often than not spending time together. And Astrid seemed to enjoy that time together just as much as Hiccup did. So why hadn't he made a move yet? It certainly looked like the odds were in his favor.

Or were they?

One thing that had nagged at Hiccup ever since the startup of his friendship with Astrid was how quickly she had warmed up to him after he had taken her on that first flight. In the span of a few hours, she had gone from twisting his arm and nearly breaking his ribs with her axe handle to kissing him on the cheek and thanking him "for everything else." He still didn't exactly know what "everything else" was. Nor did he know why Astrid's feelings toward him had so abruptly changed. She had spent most of her time either ignoring him or glaring at him for years before that fateful day, yet now she was the complete opposite. Now she was eager for the opportunity to spend time with him, and she was quite frequently flashing smiles in his direction. Why? She herself had never explained her dramatic transformation of behavior, and he had never had the courage to ask her about it. At first, he had been so overwhelmed with joy at her newfound fondness for him that he hadn't even stopped to consider what her possible motives for befriending him were. But as time had passed and she had started spending more and more time with him, doubt and suspicion had steadily begun creeping into his mind. Why did she like him all of a sudden? Did she really even like him, for that matter? Did she truly appreciate who he was as a person, or was she simply interested in associating with Berk's Big Hero? And why on earth was she spontaneously gracing him with kisses? Was it because she reciprocated his rather obvious feelings for her, or was she merely feeding her ego by having the satisfaction of kissing the most famous boy on the island? Or was the kissing merely a strange gesture of friendship, much like her punches were?

Perhaps the reason Hiccup hadn't made a move yet, then, was because of the fact that he had so many questions that Astrid had yet to answer. He was terrified of rejection, terrified that every special moment the two of them had shared together in the past several months was in fact hollow and meaningless. What if their entire friendship was a lie? What if the possible hints that it was more than friendship were simply red herrings? Hiccup could hardly bear the uncertainty that beset his mind anymore, yet he was too afraid of what the answers to his questions might be. So he remained silent and kept himself in the dark, however foolish a decision that was.

"Gods," he groaned, slumping against Toothless' belly. He really hadn't wanted to think about all this today.

The Night Fury attempted to cheer his rider up by affectionately licking Hiccup's hand and purring reassuringly. However, the dragon's efforts didn't seem to achieve much of a reaction from Hiccup, who instead of responding with a smile and a good scratch behind the dragon's ears, opted to stare blankly in the direction of the Great Hall's massive doors.

And then he saw her.

She was clearly in a foul mood, for she was storming towards the doors so quickly she was hardly more than a blur to Hiccup's eye. As soon as she reached them, she slammed her hands against the surface of one of the doors and flung it open. Someone close by called out her name, but she simply ignored it and strode out into the blinding world of white without so much as a glance backward. A few seconds later, the door banged shut behind her.

"Well, _someone's _mad."

Toothless trilled in agreement then nudged his rider once more.

"What?"

The dragon trilled more urgently and bumped his nose against Hiccup's shoulder rather hard.

"Ow!" the boy cried, grabbing his shoulder and wincing. "Toothless! Why would you do that?!"

Toothless made a low grumbling noise and stared at Hiccup with an unimpressed expression on his face.

"_What_? What do you want me to do?" the boy cried, throwing his hands up in the air. "And stop looking at me like that!"

Toothless let out an annoyed huff and nodded his head in the direction of the doors. Was his human really _this _dense?

A look of realization crossed Hiccup's features. "Ohh," he said, his eyes widening in understanding. "You want me to go talk to Astrid."

The Night Fury gurgled a "yes."

Hiccup sighed and rubbed the back of his head nervously. "Ehh I dunno, bud. She looked kind of " no, _really_" mad. I'd rather not mess with her when's she's " _HEY_!"

Toothless had whacked Hiccup's legs with his tail.

"Will you stop hitting me?! Fine! I'll go talk to her. Ow."

The dragon smirked in satisfaction. His work was done.

* * *

><p>Ten. Miss. _Eleven._ Another miss. _Twelve. _Yet another miss.

"Son of a "!" Astrid screamed, kicking a large pile of snow into the air. She had been hurling snowballs at a half-buried rock by one of the side walls of the Great Hall and so far she had only managed to hit her target five out of twelve times. Such a lack of accuracy was incredibly rare for her and she could only find one reason to explain why her aim was so abysmal at the moment. That reason was scrawny, freckled, had a mop of rust-colored hair, and happened to be missing a left foot.

"UGH! Stupid!" She continued to mutter to herself as she scooped up another handful of snow and patted it into the shape of a ball. This time, she was going to hit that sorry excuse for a rock.

She extended her arm back and paused, preparing herself for the launch. She was just about to propel her arm forward when suddenly"

"A-Astrid?"

She could recognize that voice anywhere.

She froze mid-throw, not knowing how to react. Of all the people who just _had_ to follow her outside, _he_ had been the one to do it. Of _course_ he had. He was always being problematic like that, damn him. Now what was she supposed to do? She sure as Hel wasn't in the mood to talk to him, even though spilling the thoughts currently plaguing her mind was probably the most reasonable thing for her to do.

"Astrid? Umm" |sorry to interrupt" |I mean" |am I interrupting? I just wanted to" |ummm" |check that you were" |okay? Are you? Okay I mea" "_UMPH_!"

It happened so fast that she barely had time to comprehend what she was doing. One minute she was standing, listening to him babbling, and the next she was suddenly spinning on her heel and flinging the snowball straight at him.

It smacked him right in the face and sent him toppling into the snow.

Instantly, Astrid's hands flew to her mouth as she gasped in horror. What in Odin's name had she just done?

"Oh _gods_! Hiccup! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to â€" Hiccup, are you okay?!"

He wasn't getting up. Had she really hit him that hard? Terrified, she ran toward his prostrate form as best she could through the thick layer of snow.

"_Hiccup_?!"

THWACK!

The impact against her thigh stunned her so much that for a moment she stood completely still, staring blankly at the source of the snowball. He was sitting halfway up, a satisfied smirk plastered on his reddened face.

"Oops. I was aiming for your shoulder."

She launched herself at him.

Luckily for Hiccup, the snow slowed her down and he was able to escape before she reached him. He danced backward, grinning, as she tramped through the snow in his direction.

"YOU LITTLEâ€" She reached down and gathered another handful of snow.

He let out a yelp when he realized what she was doing and made to run away, but he was too late. The snowball hit him right between the shoulder blades.

"Hahaha!" she laughed triumphantly. "GOTCHA!"

"Oh, so _that's _how it's gonna be, huh?" he yelled in playful retaliation.

And then the battle really began.

They pelted snowball after snowball at each other. Astrid landed more hits, as was to be expected, but Hiccup's arm strength had increased since the start of his combat training and he managed to strike Astrid more times than either of them anticipated. They chased each other for several minutes, lobbing more handfuls of snow than either of them could count. When they were finally out of breath, he eventually dove behind a tree to shield himself, and she behind the rock she had been using for target practice earlier.

"Come out, coward!" she shouted, hurling a snowball at the tree.

"Ha! Who are you calling a coward? Come out yourself!" He flung another snowball back at her. It missed the rock by at least a foot.

"Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah! You can't get me!" she taunted, sticking her tongue out at him.

"Oh yeah?" _SPLAT! _His snowball hit her in the arm. "OH! WHAT NOW! "

"I still have better aim!" _SMACK! _She caught him in the chest.

"Not by much!" _WHAM! _He'd gotten her right in the forehead.

"OH, YOU ARE SO GONNA GET IT THIS TIME!"

Astrid charged out from behind the rock and barreled towards her target. Hiccup cried out and stumbled sideways, desperately scrambling through the snow to get away from his approaching attacker. This time he didn't get very far. He was barely two feet away from the tree when Astrid lunged at him, tackling him to the icy ground.

"Thought you could get away, huh?" She panted, grabbing at his arms. He flailed and kicked her in the shin, causing her recoil in pain. He took the opportunity to attempt to roll out from under her, but she recovered too quickly and managed to grab hold of one of his wrists.

"Don't. Even. Try," she huffed. "OOF!"

He'd shoved a handful of snow in her face. She howled and made to grab his free hand but he ducked his arm under hers and suddenly tickled her stomach. She squealed in surprise and jumped away from him, releasing her grip on his other wrist.

"NO FAIR!"

Smirking in victory, Hiccup seized his chance and leapt forward, assaulting Astrid with more tickles.

She shrieked with giggles and collapsed into the snow. "Oh my _gods_, STOP IT!" she cried, tossing from side to side in an attempt to flee Hiccup's relentless fingers. She batted her hands at him and tried to assail him with tickles of her own. After several moments she caught him under his arms and he doubled over with laughter, falling to the side. They tumbled through the snow, a tangle of floundering limbs, until Astrid finally managed to grab hold of Hiccup's wrists again and rolled over, pinning him to the ground.

And then they stopped, breathless. And stared.

Their cheeks were flushed scarlet from the cold and from exhaustion. Astrid's bangs were soaked and plastered to her forehead, as were Hiccup's. They were so close that each could spot the other's freckles dotting the bridge of his or her nose, and each could each feel the other's warm breath softly caressing his or her skin. Suddenly their gazes locked. Hiccup's heart got lodged somewhere in his throat as his sight collided with the piercing blue sparkle of Astrid's eyes. Little did he know Astrid's heart was doing the same as she drank in the deep, soothing green of his own eyes. Each felt as if the other was drawing him or her closer and closer, so close that their noses brushed â€œ

_KISS HER, YOU IDIOT! _Hiccup's brain screamed.

_NO! Damn it, you promised you wouldn't kiss him again! _Astrid's mind cried.

Their eyelids fluttered closed.

WHACK!

A snowball appeared out of nowhere and slammed into Astrid's head, knocking her to the ground.

"Holy _Thor_, you _totally _did not see that coming!" cackled a familiar voice.

Astrid spluttered and furiously wiped the snow away from her mouth as Hiccup struggled to sit up. A short distance away stood none other than a guffawing Ruffnut Thorston, joined by her equally amused brother.

"You should see the looks on your faces!" cried Tuffnut, clutching his side and pointing at the disgruntled pair. "Priceless!"

Astrid, livid, flew to her feet. "YOU TROLL-FACED DUNG-BRAINS!" she screamed. "You are SO going to pay for this!" She scooped up a large handful of snow and hurled it in the direction of Ruffnut's head. It smacked the twin's helmet and sent it flying to the ground.

"HEY!" Ruffnut yelled indignantly.

"Oh, sweet, are we gonna have a snowball fight now?" piped up Tuffnut excitedly.

"Oh _Hel _yeah we are!" Ruffnut bellowed, picking up her helmet and placing it back atop her head. "It's ON!"

"Well, I guess it's us against them," muttered Hiccup as he stood up, brushing the snow off his clothes. He glanced shyly at the girl next to him. "Ermâ€¦partners?"

Astrid blushed. "Yeah," she replied, more quietly than she normally would have. "Let's get 'em."

And with that, another battle began.

* * *

><p>AN: So how was it? I apologize again if the long descriptive parts about Astrid's and Hiccup's feelings dragged, but as I said before, I really feel that all of that needed to be written. I think a major factor in their relationship is their emotional vulnerability and their unwillingness to to showcase that vulnerability. Hiccup's insecurities are pretty self-explanatory, given the context of the movie. As for Astrid, she's a bit more complicated and I will go into more depth about her issues in a later chapter - I want to gradually build up to her reveal of the original cause for her confusing behavior. **

**As for the last part of the chapter, I wanted to capture some of the playful (read: flirtatious) competitiveness Hiccup and Astrid have with each other throughout the show, especially since that competitive vibe showed up in the "dragonboarding" scene in this episode. I think it adds a layer to their relationship, plus it's just plain adorable. **

****Also, yes. TOOTHLESS IS TOTALLY A HICCSTRID SHIPPER.
:p****

****Anyway, thanks again for reading! ****

4. The Terrible Twos

Dear Readers,****

_Once again, thanks so much for your reviews! They really do keep me going :) I've noticed I've been keeping a sort of regular schedule with updating this every ten days or so. That was unintentional, but it works, so I guess I'm going to try to keep that up so I don't have any abnormally large gaps between updates. If I update sooner than every couple of weeks, consider it a treat! Anyway, this "chapter" is another short conversation between Hiccup and Astrid. As I mentioned before, I really do like the idea of the two of them just
_talking _- it builds up the trust between them, and that's important for any relationship. The two of them still have a ways to go, but they're getting there ;) _ ****

****_Once again I'm glad you're enjoying this fic and I hope you continue to stay tuned!_****

****_Best regards,_****

****_Pooka_****

*** * ***

><p>IV. The Terrible Twos

*** * ***

><p>Okay, he was definitely depressed.

It surprised her how well she could read his body language after having only been friends with him for less than a year. Perhaps all those years of silently observing him were to blame for her keen eye â€" but that wasn't something she was eager to contemplate at the moment. No, it was best to stay focused on the matter at hand.

He was certainly in a bad mood, she thought to herself as she quietly approached the forge. The slight slump in his shoulders was unmistakable â€" at least to her anyway â€" and the frown on his face was more rigid than one of mere concentration. He was pounding at the sword on the workbench a little bit harder than was necessary, too. Something was up, and she was going to get the story out of him.

"Alright, spill it."

He jumped and nearly knocked the unfinished sword to the floor. "AAH! _Gods_, Astrid! Why do you always do that?"

"Sorry," she replied nonchalantly, leaning against a wooden support beam for the forge's roof. "But you're upset and I came to talk to you."

Hiccup turned back to the sword and continued ruthlessly pummeling it with his hammer. "Yeah, well, I'm kind of busy," he snapped.

Astrid wasn't one to give up so easily. Nor was she one to beat around the bush for long. "This is about Torch and Toothless, isn't it?"

Hiccup groaned and dropped the hammer onto the workbench with a loud _clang_. "Look, Astrid, I don't really want to t  "

"Yes you do. And _don't_ give me that look."

Hiccup sighed and plunged the sword into a bucket of water to cool it off before wiping his hands on his apron and plopping down on a bench nearby. "It's Toothless, okay? He's acting crazy and I had to leave him in the Cove earlier."

Ah, now _that_ _explained_ everything.

Astrid's demeanor softened at the dejected expression on Hiccup's face and she moved to sit next to him. "I'm sorry," she said more gently. "What happened?"

Hiccup pressed his elbows into his knees as he stared intently at the dirt. "Ever since I brought Torch home, Toothless has been  I dunno  throwing hissy fits. Growling at Torch, being irritable   " I guess he's jealous or something."

"Well, I'm not surprised; you _are_ _kind_ of hot property these days."

The Viking boy's head whipped to the side and he eyed Astrid in shock.

Oh good gods, did I just say that out loud? _the_ blonde thought to herself, her face flooding with sudden warmth. "I, uh, I just mean that  um  you're popular  now  " she spluttered lamely.

"Uh  right," the boy replied, scratching the back of his head awkwardly and turning away again. "So  "

"How are you doing?" Astrid interrupted quickly.

Hiccup shrugged, forgetting the past moment. "You know," he muttered. "I _hate_ leaving him. He just gives me this _look_ _and_ it makes me feel so guilty. But I _had_ _to_ leave him there, Astrid." He glanced up at her and the pain pooling in his eyes caused her heart to clench in her chest. She couldn't stand to see him look like that.

"Well, if he was causing problems  "

"He was. I mean, he set my room on fire while he was chasing Torch! I can't keep him around when he's like this. But every time I think about him I just see his face staring at me like I've just done the worst thing I could possibly do and I feel so awful   "

"Hiccup," Astrid interrupted firmly, taking her friend's hands in hers. They were still warm from the heat of the forge's fire. "Look at me."

Reluctantly he lifted his chin to meet her determined gaze. "Astrid
â€œ"

"Shh. Listen." She let go of one of his hands to press a finger to his lips. "I know you feel guilty and terrible about this, but you did the right thing. If Toothless stayed in the same space with Torch for much longer, who knows what kind of damage he could've caused. It's okay. He'll snap out of it after a little while. He may be jealous now, but he'll figure out that you still love him. It'll just take some time."

"Yeah, but that's the thing, Astrid," Hiccup sighed, pulling away from her in frustration. "Something about this doesn't feel right. I don't know what it is, but something just doesn't add up."

"Hiccup," Astrid murmured softly, clasping one of his hands again. "Everything's going to be fine. Okay? Stop beating yourself up over this."

"I wish I could believe you," the Viking boy replied worriedly. "Butâ€¦I don't know. Something's off."

The blonde stood up and pulled Hiccup with her. "Well, think about it after dinner. Maybe you'll feel better on a full stomach. Come on." She gently tugged his arm in the direction of the Great Hall.

The dragon trainer sighed and nodded in resignation. "I guess." With that, he allowed his companion to lead him out of the forge.

Oddly enough, both Vikings failed to notice that their hands remained joined for the entirety of their walk.

* * *

><p>AN: So I hope that wasn't just a repeat of my installment for "Viking for Hire." It was a similar concept, but a different topic. If any of you are wondering if any of these "conversation" ficlets will involve Astrid being the one spilling her heart out to Hiccup, don't worry. That is coming very soon! They can't learn to lean on each other if only one of them does the talking**, **although for some reason my interpretation of Astrid is turning out to be an unexpectedly good therapist for Hiccup :P Anyway, thanks again for reading, and don't hesitate to leave a review!**

5. In Dragons We Trust

**Dear Readers,**

**Once again, somehow I magically updated this on a regular schedule. Seriously, before this point I wasn't planning to update every ten days or so, but it's just been happening that way so I guess it's going to stay like that. I think with my insanely busy semester that seems to be a pretty good (read: miraculously short considering the hiatuses I have put stuff on before) time gap between updates. **

_**Anyway, thanks again for all your reviews! I know I repeat myself every chapter, but they really do make me feel happy inside and I'm

very grateful for all of them. I'm so glad everyone is enjoying this so much. **_

**Before I leave you to read this next installment, I would just like to say that the premiere of ****Dreamworks' Dragons: Defenders of Berk_ WAS EPIC and I am SO excited for this season! And the Hiccstrid - who noticed all that Hiccstrid snarkiness in there? Wasn't it great? I can't wait till I finally get around to writing a series of oneshots for season 2 (which I hope to do at some point before HTTYD 2 comes out) because I can tell the chemistry between the two of them is at least twice the amount it was last season. WHICH IS JUST AWESOME! I'm really looking forward to seeing more of them bantering and whatnot in later episodes. Yes, I am totally fangirling over this, but I regret nothing. ::squeals like a maniac:: I WILL SHIP THIS TILL I DIE, I TELL YOU._**

::ahem::

Anyhoo, I will depart this author's note now and let you read. Thanks again for your continued support!

Best regards,

Pooka

* * *

><p>V. In Dragons We Trust

* * *

><p>"As you fly through life, it's always good to know who you can trust and who you can't."

~ Hiccup

* * *

><p>Click!

Hiccup's eyes flew to the door in panic. Mildew was back already?

Rattle-rattle-rattleâ€"

"Crapcrapcrapcrap," Hiccup muttered to himself as his gaze darted this way and that, desperately searching for a place to hide. He hurriedly shoved the fake dragon claws back into place behind the curtain. Perhaps he could hide there? No. That was too obvious. Under the bed? No. What if Mildew found the urge to go on a cleaning spree? Not that the likelihood of that happening was very high, but stillâ€|

"Ugh! Great. What am I supposed toâ€"" All of a sudden, the boy's eyes caught sight of the rope hanging down from the shattered roof.

"Got it!" he exclaimed under his breath and bolted for his only means of escape.

He made a mental note to thank Astrid again for her rigorous combat training lessons. Without them, he was quite sure that his limbs wouldn't have been strong enough to haul him up the length of rope so quickly. As it was, he had managed to pull himself out of Mildew's line of sight just as the cantankerous old Viking had flung the door open and sauntered into the house, his trusty sheep in tow. Hiccup just hoped that by some miracle the old man wouldn't stay for more than a few minutes. The boy didn't know how long he would be able to hold himself in his current position—the muscles in his arms were already beginning to burn with the effort of keeping his body steady.

"I'm home, ladies!" Mildew cried cheerfully as he strode towards the portraits of his three deceased wives. When he reached the back wall he cupped a hand to his ear and leaned forward. "What's that y'say?" he called mockingly. "Nuthin'? Perfect."

He turned on his heel and started towards the pot of stew he'd left bubbling, but something stopped him in his tracks. Far above the man's head, Hiccup froze in fear. Had Mildew sensed his presence?

_Please don't look up, please don't look up, please don't look up, _Hiccup silently begged as his heart hammered against his ribcage.

Luckily, the crotchety Viking instead had his sights set on the ratty curtain concealing the dragon claws. "Hmm," he murmured in suspicion. He frowned, then whipped the curtain back to reveal only the claws and no intruder.

For a brief moment Mildew eyed his handiwork thoughtfully, as if contemplating something. Then he laid his staff against the wall and grabbed hold of the offending items as his lips twisted into a wicked smirk.

"Ahh, these served us well, didn't they, Fungus?"

"_Baaaa,_ " the sheep answered as if in agreement.

"Shame we have to get rid of 'em."

As the man headed for the door, Hiccup suddenly felt a drop of sweat threaten to slide off his cheek. _No! _he inwardly cried. If Mildew felt something wet fall on his head, he would instinctively look up and the boy's cover would be blown. The rope dug into Hiccup's palms as he clutched it more tightly in apprehension. _Please don't look up, please don't look up_! he begged again.

The bead of sweat dropped to the floor.

For a split second time seemed to slow down. Then, as if the gods had heard Hiccup's pleading, Mildew stepped forward and Fungus took the Viking's place right beneath where Hiccup was dangling precariously from the roof. The droplet landed with a tiny splash on the sheep's head.

Fungus _baa_-ed in surprise and glanced upward. He caught sight of Hiccup clinging to the rope for dear life and _baa_-ed again as if to

get his owner's attention. Much to Hiccup's relief, Mildew ignored the sheep's bleating for the time being and exited out the front door.

"_Baaaaa_," Fungus repeated, turning to look at Hiccup once again. Even from such a far distance above, the boy swore the sheep was glaring at him.

Thankfully Fungus then left the boy to his own devices and followed Mildew out the door. As soon as the two were out of sight, Hiccup quickly hoisted himself up the remainder of the length of rope and crawled onto the roof. He crouched behind the dragonhead carving just above the door and watched as Mildew and Fungus made their way to the edge of the cliff.

Hiccup knew without a doubt now what was going to happen.

And sure enough, once Mildew and his companion reached their destination, the old man tossed the dragon claws into the ocean below.

That was it. Hiccup _had _to do something. Mildew needed his comeuppance, and more importantly, Berk needed its dragons. The boy knew that without solid proof in his hands his father would never accept the accusation even if he wanted to. Yet even if the chances of finding the evidence were now a million to one, Hiccup had to try. But first he needed help. He couldn't find the proof on his own, not after Mildew had discarded it in the sea. Hiccup needed to tell someone who could back him up, who would trust him enough to take him at his word and not doubt his story.

And he knew exactly who that someone was.

* * *

><p>It was far too quiet.<p>

Months ago, the reality of a dragon-less Berk would have been a great relief to Astrid and she couldn't have cared less about the beasts' absence. The lack of extra noise, for one thing, would've been eagerly welcomed. But now here she was, sitting in the barn made specially for _her dragon_, moping because said dragon was decidedly missing. It often astonished her to think of how quickly sheâ€"and everyone else, for that matterâ€"had grown so attached to the dragons and so used to incorporating them into everyday life on the island. No one had anticipated the gaping void that had been left once the dragons had been banished. Even those who had been swept up in Mildew's anti-dragon vendetta had a sort of melancholy hovering about them as they went about their daily routines. Everything was soâ€"|_empty _now.

And Astrid was absolutely miserable.

The night before she'd had a breathtaking dream about flying with Stormfly above the clouds during sunrise, only to wake up and realize that her beloved companion was no longer there to greet her or take her on such a flight. The disappointment of that had subsequently ruined the girl's appetite, much to her mother's dismay. And ever since she'd finished her morning chores, all Astrid had done all day was wreak destruction upon several tree trunks in the forest and

afterward return home to sit slumped against the back wall of the vacant barn with a dismal look on her face. Normally she would've tried to find Hiccup so she wouldn't have had to sulk alone, but his father had commissioned him with the task of repairing the roof of that sordid dung-brain Mildew. So here she was, on her own, in a state of utter gloom that she wasn't able to shake.

"Damn it all to Hel," she muttered, squeezing her eyes shut. The only thing she had left to do now was take a nap. At least it was better than doing nothing and forcing herself to not cry.

"_Astrid!_"

Her eyes flew open.

"Hiccup? What are you doing here?"

He gasped for breath as he wobbled into the barn, his face flushed scarlet and his bangs plastered to his forehead with sweat. Clearly he had been running, and for a while too.

Astrid sat up, the realization dawning on her. "Did you just run here from Mildew's house?"

Hiccup nodded vigorously. "Iâ€¦I have toâ€¦I sawâ€¦I was right, Astrid!" His green eyes were blazing with a sense of urgency that caused the girl to snap out of her current depression and get up to move towards her flustered friend.

"Sit down and catch your breath," Astrid said firmly, grabbing hold of Hiccup's shoulders and maneuvering him so he could sit against the wall. She glanced down and suddenly noticed that his palms were rubbed raw and nearly as red as his face. "Good gods, what happened to your hands?!"

She half-expected him to grin sheepishly and provide a cheeky response, but his expression remained every bit as serious as it had been when he'd arrived moments before. That bothered her immensely. "Ropeâ€¦burn. It'sâ€¦kind of a longâ€¦story," he panted.

"I should get some salve for that," she replied, her eyes wide with concern. She turned as if to head inside her house.

"No!" Hiccup cried. "No, Astridâ€¦I have toâ€¦I have to tell you something. _Now._"

"Hiccup, your haâ€¦"

"My hands can wait," he interrupted. For a moment Astrid stood still, unsure of what to do. The intensity of his gaze was growing so unnerving that she almost gave in and sat back down, but then he began coughing violently and she regained her resolve.

"You need a drink of water. I'll be right back."

"Astâ€¦" _cough "â€¦_rid!" he called, but she disappeared before Hiccup could say anything more.

"Great," Hiccup groaned, leaning his head against the wall. There was no time. The only piece of evidence that could exonerate the dragons

was floating farther and farther out to sea with every passing minute. He needed to gather a search party as quickly as possible, but he knew for certain that that endeavor would be successful only if he had Astrid's support. The other members of their motley band of friends had all but given up hope on proving the innocence of their dragons; Hiccup was sure none of them would be receptive to what they would inevitably perceive as yet another one of his crazy schemes. That is, unless Astrid was there to validate his story, or at the very least threaten them into complying with his plan.

"Back," the blonde announced, carrying a bundle of assorted items in her arms. She placed the items at Hiccup's feet and thrust a waterskin in his face.

"Drink," she demanded.

Despite his impatience, Hiccup figured by the dangerous glint in Astrid's eyes that it was wisest to obey. He gulped down several mouthfuls of water until the girl's expression indicated she was satisfied.

"Now about yourâ€" "

"Astrid, please, for gods' sakes, forget about my hands. We don't have a lot of time."

Astrid frowned at him. "What are you talking about?"

"Remember our conversation on the way back from Dragon Island? I was right about Mildew. He framed the dragons and I saw proof of it, I swear."

At that, Astrid's eyes widened. "Really? Are you sure?"

Hiccup nodded. "I was fixing his roof and I decided to investigate while Mildew was out of the house. While I was inside I found two fake Zippleback feet and a fake Nightmare claw. I was able to hide just in time before he got back and I saw him throw everything off the cliff into the ocean."

Astrid sat in silence for a moment, her brow furrowing as she let her brain process Hiccup's words. "You're absolutely sure that's what you saw," she finally said quietly as her eyes darted away to stare at the ground.

A wave of panic slowly began to rise in Hiccup's mind. He had expected Astrid to accept the story and immediately jump to a plan of action as she usually did, but instead she was behaving as if she doubted him. How could she think he was lying? The only time he had really ever lied to her was when he had been hiding Toothless, and that had been for the Night Fury's protection. And anyway, why would he make up a story like this? Could she possibly think he was so distraught over losing the dragons that he'd hallucinated it all?

"Youâ€"you believe me, right?"

Astrid re-focused her gaze on Hiccup and opened her mouth as if to speak, but the boy suddenly interrupted her, the words he spoke next tumbling off his tongue as if they had a mind of their own.

"Astrid, you have to believe me," he pleaded. "You're the first person I've told this toâ€"I always tell you everything first because you're the only one who really listens and doesn't think I'm crazy or desperate or something. Or maybe you do, but not like everyone else would." Why was he telling her this? Whatever the reason, now he couldn't seem to stop. "Iâ€"I trust you. That first time with Toothless, I thought you were going to tell on me but then you didn't and kept my secret instead. And without you I don't know if I would've figured out how to go after the Red Death. And after thatâ€"I don't knowâ€"I justâ€"I knew you would listen to me the way no one else would and believe in me even if no one else would andâ€"and...I need you to believe me. Please."

For a brief moment, Astrid merely blinked and stared at Hiccup, wide-eyed, her expression unreadable. Then she suddenly balled her hand into a fist and punched him in the shoulder.

"OWW! Why would youâ€"what was that for?!"

Astrid smirked, although unbeknownst to Hiccup, the smirk didn't quite reach her eyes. "You idiot. I was about to say I believed you before you interrupted me," she replied teasingly. "I was just thinking about how we're going to convince your dad if the proof is currently sinking to the bottom of the ocean."

"Oh," Hiccup said sheepishly, his face flushing redder than it already was. "Well, uh, we have to check the closest beach to see if we can find anything. It's a long shot, but we have to try."

"Okay, but it's not like those dragon claws are just going to wash up on shore right away. It might take weeks. Or months."

"It doesn't matter. We keep searching until we find something that will get our dragons back. You just have to help me convince everybody to go along with it."

Astrid raised an eyebrow in amusement. "Oh, so you're giving me orders now?"

For the first time that afternoon, Hiccup's mouth broke into a smile. "Considering you ordered me to drink all that water, I think we're even."

The blonde sighed and rolled her eyes. "Fine. Can I take care of your hands now before we go 'beachcombing'? You're being a horrible patient."

"Yes, healer Hofferson," the boy retorted, presenting his palms.

Astrid shook her head as she uncorked a bottle of liquid and dabbed some onto a small cloth. "How did you get rope burn anyway? What were you doing, hanging from Mildew's roof?"

Hiccup chuckled. "You could say thatâ€"!"

* * *

><p>AN: Before I wrote this I re-watched the episode and I

realized that the beginning quote from Hiccup in the ep was absolutely perfect for what I wanted to get across in this chapter. So, naturally, I included the quote at the top here :D My friend KateMarie999 mentioned a while ago that there needed to be some explanation of why Hiccup trusts Astrid so much, so I tried to do the best to incorporate the justification for his trust that I had floating around in my head. Of course, it comes out of Hiccup's mouth at the randomest time in the most non-eloquent way possible - that's just how Hiccup seems to operate much of the time, lol. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed, and thanks for reading and reviewing!**

6. Alvin and the Outcasts

**Dear Readers,**

_**So again, some supernatural force wants me to update this only every ten days or so. I got a head-start on this chapter so I honestly thought I'd have it up much sooner, but then my schedule got in the way, as it has been doing of late. But I vowed to finish this today. And I have! FINALLY! GAH! I'm so tired of this chapter, to be honest - it was the most exhausting to write for some reason.

>_

**But anyway, thanks again for all your lovely reviews! As always, I truly do appreciate them. Also, before I go, I would like to thank KateMarie999 for the suggestion that became the last part of this installment (and for some of the dialogue in that part). Without that idea, the rest of this probably wouldn't have been written because I would've been stuck with writer's block.**

**Anyhoo, enjoy!**

**Best regards,**

**Pooka**

* * *

><p>VI. Alvin and the Outcasts

* * *

><p>"You're bluffin'."

"Am I? Well, there's only one way to find out. Take me to Dragon Island."

"_WHAT?!_" Astrid cried aloud before she could stop herself. "Hiccup, _no_"

Alvin the Treacherous tore his gaze from the self-proclaimed "Dragon Conqueror" beneath him. "Oh how _sweet_" the hefty marauder chuckled darkly, striding towards the blonde until he was looming ominously over her trembling figure. "Someone's worried about her li'l boyfriend here! Well, I wouldn't concern yourself so much, darling. I promise we'll take good care of 'im." He grinned wickedly.

The girl balled her hands into fists at her sides. "You are _not

_taking him," she said through gritted teeth.

Alvin clutched Astrid's upper arm with a meaty hand, causing the girl to unwittingly whimper in pain. "Now don't get fresh with me, young ladyâ€" "

"Alvin! _Let. Her. GO._"

Alvin suddenly threw his head back and let out a thunderous cackle that could have rattled the very stones he was standing upon. "OH0!" he bellowed, throwing his arms into the air and pivoting to face the hostages on the beach. "Look at this! Such _chivalry_ from a couple o' scrawny li'l kids! I'm so _touched_." The raider clutched at his heart mockingly. "I think I might cry. Young love is precious, innit?"

"Alvin," Hiccup interrupted in a firm voice, "just take me to Dragon Island and you can see for yourself if I'm bluffing or not."

"Oh, but now after all this I'd 'ate to separate you from your lovely li'l shieldmaiden 'ere. It seems such a shame to break you apart. Per'aps I'll bring 'er along."

"Leave her out of it!" the boy yelled, advancing towards the invader. "Either I go alone, or you lose your chance of finding out if I'm the 'Dragon Conqueror' or not. Take it or leave it."

"Eheh, you're a cheeky li'l bastard, 'iccup," Alvin mused, his eyes glinting with amusement. "If you weren't so smallâ€"and the son o' me mortal enemy, for that matterâ€"I'd consider recruitin' you." He paused. "Wellâ€"I suppose in a sense I am, actually. That is, if you really _are _the Dragon Conqueror." His chest rumbled with mirth yet again. Then he quickly turned to his fellow Outcasts. "Grab 'im!"

Before Hiccup could blink twice, Savage and another Outcast rushed forward and seized him by the arms. Astrid started towards them, but he shook his head fervently to dissuade her.

"Astrid, _no_. Let me go. I promise it'll be okay."

An expression of pure panic crossed Astrid's features. "You can't know that! Hiccup, don't _do _this!"

"Oh, look, how _adorable_! Are you _sure_ you don' want me to bring 'er?" Alvin teased. "We've got extra room on me ship."

"I said, _leave her out of it_, " Hiccup nearly growled, glaring threateningly at his captor.

Alvin sighed, feigning disappointment. "Aw, but it would've made for quite the entertainment. Well, never mind then. Come on men, let's go! And you"â€"he thrust a finger at the remaining Outcasts guarding the group of hostagesâ€" "keep a watch on the rest of 'em. Especially the li'l lovebird over there." He nodded his head in Astrid's direction.

"Hiccup," Astrid pleaded helplessly. "Hiccup, _no_."

The boy's eyes locked with hers. "Just trust me, Astrid," he called

reassuringly as the two men began escorting him up the rock face.

Knowing she had no other choice than to heed his words, Astrid merely stood rooted to the spot, staring wistfully after Hiccup until he and his captors had disappeared beyond the cliff.

She hoped to the gods he knew what he was doing.

* * *

><p>"Astrid, you get your dragons."<p>

The blonde nodded at the chief as Snotlout and the twins began causing a commotion on the other side of the ship. It had been several hours since Hiccup had handed himself over to Alvin, and during that time Astrid's mind had been dancing on the edge of complete panic. She had just barely been able to keep a nervous breakdown at bay, her only motivation for doing so being that a chaotically emotional version of herself would be utterly useless during a rescue attempt and that that would probably result in Hiccup'sâ€_no_. She did _NOT_ want to consider that possibility. Astrid was suddenly reminded of the Hel she had gone through those several weeks after her friend had been brought home from the fight with the Red Death. The constant dread of not knowing how he was doing at every moment or if he would survive his injuries had nearly undone the poor girl's sanity, and after that experience she had _never_ wanted to go through that kind of gut-wrenching terror ever again. On occasion, she still had nightmares in which all she could hear were the anguished shrieks coming from Hiccup's window as Gobber tended to the boy's mangled leg. Reliving that time in her memory was enough of a strain on her heart; Astrid didn't know if she would be able to handle it if something _worse_ happened to Hiccup this time around.

All she could do for now was pray that Hiccup would find a way to get to Toothless once Alvin's party arrived at Dragon Island. In spite of her anxiety, Astrid had to marvel at the boy's ingenious thinking. At first, when Hiccup had so willingly placed himself at the mercy of the Outcasts, Astrid had been so distraught that she had been at a loss to understand the reasoning behind his bold decision. But in the hour after Alvin had taken him, the girl had come to realize Hiccup's plan. If Hiccup convinced Alvin to take him to Dragon Island, then the boy would have a chance to reunite with Toothless and gain the advantage on the Outcasts. It was risky, but brilliant all the same, and Astrid couldn't help but admire her friend for it. She just hoped the plan would work. Otherwiseâ€|

THUNK!

The ship had landed ashore. There was no sign of the Outcasts so Astrid assumed their ship had docked on a different part of the island.

"All right, you five get to your dragons," Stoick commanded as everyone disembarked. "See if you can find out where Hiccup and Alvin are and report back here. But for the love of Thor"â€"here he glared fiercely at the twinsâ€"_don't_ give yourselves away. You will put everybody in serious jeopardy if you do."

Astrid gulped and nodded together with her companions. Quietly they began to venture inland, carrying the saddles they had brought with them on the ride over.

"So, uh, how are we gonna find our dragons again?" questioned Tuffnut after a short while. "They could be anywhere."

"We could just call for them, you idiot," Ruffnut retorted, kicking her brother in the shin.

"OWW!"

Snotlout rolled his eyes. "But if Alvin hears us, that would _give us away. _Y'know, the exact thing the chief told us _not _to do?"

"Ugh, but looking for them is going to take _forever_ if we don't do _something_," Ruffnut groaned.

"Yeah, if we just keep wandering, by the time we get to Hiccup he'll probably already be dead!"

"_Stop it_!" hissed Astrid, cutting Tuffnut off before he could give voice to the one horrifying thought that was running rampant through her mind.

"Y'know, I have to admit, the twins do have a point, though," Fishlegs interjected timidly.

Astrid sighed. As much as she hated to consider the weight of Tuffnut's last statement, Fishlegs was right. "Okay, look. Maybe!" An idea suddenly struck her. "Wait. Sometimes I call Stormfly by whistling. That won't be as loud as calling, and if Alvin's far enough away he won't be able to hear it. If she comes, then she can lead me to the other dragons and we can lead them back to you together."

Without hesitation, Astrid placed her fingers between her teeth and whistled as hard as she could without making too much noise.

Silence.

"How is she supposed to tell it's you whistling and not some other random person?" Tuffnut mused. "I mean, it could totally be Alvin whistling!" "can he whistle?" He eyed his sister inquisitively. Ruffnut merely huffed and rolled her eyes at him.

"She knows my whistle, trust me," Astrid replied sharply. "Come on, Stormfly," she whispered to the air before whistling once more.

This time, the whistle was met with a faint roar from a distance.

"Oh, that's definitely a Nadder, all right," Fishlegs remarked excitedly.

And sure enough, a few moments later, the striking blue Nadder flew into view above the group's heads. She wasted no time in landing with a _thump _on the ground and rushing towards her rider with unbridled enthusiasm.

"Stormfly! Fly! H-hey, girl," Astrid laughed as the dragon knocked her onto the ground, nuzzling her chest with frenzied affection. "I missed you too."

Stormfly crooned happily and licked Astrid's cheek as the girl scratched the dragon's snout.

"Um, okay, I'm real happy for you and everything, but aren't we on a time limit here?" Snotlout interrupted.

Astrid ignored him, but nevertheless she pushed Stormfly's face away and stood up. "We'll catch up later, girl," she murmured, rubbing the dragon's chin. "Right now we have to help Hiccup."

Within moments she had Stormfly saddled. "We'll bring the others back here and then we can scout for Hiccup," Astrid said as she mounted the Nadder. "Don't do anything stupid."

"Who are you calling stupid?" Tuffnut called indignantly, but Astrid and Stormfly were already too high in the air for the girl to hear him.

A few minutes later, the Deadly Nadder and her rider reappeared with a small host of dragons in tow. After a brief period of fond exclamations, excited embraces, and Hookfang nearly setting Snotlout's rear end aflame for no apparent reason, the remaining riders saddled and mounted their dragons, preparing for takeoff.

"Okay, everybody, fly low and keep quiet," Astrid instructed. Within seconds the dragons were in the air.

It wasn't long before the group spotted Alvin's ship arriving, surprisingly, less than a mile down shore from where they had docked. By some stroke of luck, their ship had overtaken Alvin's on the way to the island and had landed first. Astrid craned her neck to see if she could spot the telltale mop of auburn hair on deck, but the ship was too far away and there was too much risk in trying to fly any closer.

So the group doubled back to where Stoick was waiting with their ship, nervously anticipating any news.

"Did you find anything?" the chief asked when they returned.

"Outcast boat. A little ways down shore," Astrid replied, pointing in the direction of Alvin's ship. "Hiccup has to be there."

"All right. We'll pilot the ship that way and use the fog to our advantage. Astrid, you and the others take the lead with the dragons. But don't get too close until I say so. We can't blow our cover too early. Got it?"

Stoick was met with a chorus of "yes, chief," after which the Vikings began to embark on the next part of their mission. They traveled in relative silence for several minutes, but the silence was short-lived. As soon as they began nearing the bank where Alvin had parked his boat, they were met with a cacophony of noise that could

only be the product of a battle underway.

"LOOK OUT!" an all-too familiar voice cried out from amidst the chaos.

And then Astrid spotted him.

He was astride Toothless, who was flailing in mid-air and desperately dodging a barrage of catapulted boulders. Immediately, a surge of unspeakable terror swept through every inch of Astrid's body. Before the girl could comprehend what she was doing, she kicked Stormfly into an aerial sprint and sped towards the pair as fast as the Nadder could fly.

"_HICCUP_!" she screamed.

A cluster of arrows sliced through the fog, heading straight for the Night Fury and his rider.

"STORMFLY, _FIRE_!"

Instantly, the dragon spit out a jet of flame that engulfed the arrows in one swift stroke.

They were saved. Thank _gods_.

Astrid let out a massive sigh of relief as Hiccup and Toothless finally managed to regain their balance and glided into cadence with her and the Deadly Nadder.

"Eh, what took you so long?"

Of course. Of _course_ the first thing to come out of that infuriating boy's mouth right after he and his dragon had almost been shot to death was some kind of sarcastic joke.

"Why, did you miss me?" Astrid automatically replied, doing an excellent job of masking the abject fear she had been feeling a few moments prior. She wasn't exactly sure how she hadn't ended up punching him for being so insensitive.

But then again, as clueless as he could be sometimes, he most likely had no idea just how terrified she had been. And it was probably better that way, at least for the time being.

"Hiccup!" someoneâ€"either Fishlegs or Snotloutâ€"called, alerting both riders to yet another array of boulders hurtling in their direction. The dragons twirled through the air, successfully evading the shots.

"We've gotta get in closer!" Hiccup yelled as he and Astrid joined the rest of the group.

"AIM FOR THEIR CATAPULTS! IF WE KNOCK THEM OUT, THE DRAGONS CAN FINISH OFF THE SHIP!" Stoick bellowed from below. "FIRE!"

"MOVE OFFSHORE!" Alvin howled as stream of boulders assailed his crew. Slowly, the ship started to make its way towards open water.

"Here's our chance! Come on!" Hiccup shouted, leading his entourage into a steep dive.

The dragons split into two groups and began circling around opposite sides of Alvin's ship. Astrid and Stormfly swooped in close, preparing for attack.

"OOOOH SHOOT THAT DRAGON DOWN! FIRE!"

Astrid didn't see the boulder coming.

Hiccup, however, did. But by the time he opened his mouth to warn her, it was too late. Stormfly spun upside down in a panicked attempt to escape the oncoming threat, flinging her rider out of the saddle in the process. The boy watched in horror as Astrid plummeted downward, smacked into the mast of Alvin's ship, and crashed violently onto the deck.

"_ASTRID_" he cried.

Thankfully, Astrid recovered quickly from her fall and rushed to the edge of the boat. "HICCUP!" she screamed, frantically waving her arms.

Hiccup and Toothless lunged. But before the Night Fury could reach Astrid, Alvin all of a sudden appeared and fiercely grabbed hold of the girl's arm, yanking her roughly to the side. Astrid gasped and cried out in pain.

Hiccup wasn't quite able to describe the feeling that suddenly overtook him in that instant. All the boy knew was that at the very second he spotted Alvin seizing Astrid and heard her cry, an intense burning flared up in his gut and set every nerve in his body ablaze. _No one _laid a hand on his Astrid like that. He was going to give Alvin _Hel _for daring to manhandle her_. _Within moments that Outcast was going to be treading water and regretting that he had even considered the idea touching her againâ€

"Don't miss this time!"

Hiccup's brain snapped back into focus and he steered Toothless out of the arrows' path just in time.

"Hold your fireâ€he's got Astrid!" he hollered at the rest of the riders, who were ready to strike the boat at any moment.

A blast of flame plunged into the water, just barely missing Alvin's ship.

"_What are you doing?!_" the boy shrieked at Snotlout, his mind veering towards total panic. Astrid could have been kiâ€_no_, he wasn't going to think about that, he was _not _going to entertain the possibility of that happeningâ€|

"I heard you say 'fire'!" Snotlout retorted.

"I said, '_hold your fire_'!" Hiccup shouted angrily.

"_See_, you said it again!"

"NO! HE'S RIGHT!" Stoick yelled from his position on their ship.
"FIRE AGAIN, HICCUP! ALL OF YOU!"

Hiccup furrowed his brow as he processed his father's command. Fire again? Why? Astrid was still on the boat!

Then he caught sight of the smoke, and everything clicked into place.

"EVERYONE, FIRE INTO THE WATER!"

They did just that. In a few moments Alvin's entire ship was shrouded in a smoky haze. Hiccup maneuvered Toothless into the murk and squinted, hoping to catch a glimpse of Astrid. An eerie silence settled over the area, save for Alvin shouting at his crew to shoot at everything. Luckily, the crew's visibility was so compromised that none of their shots even came close to hitting Hiccup or the other riders. And then—

BAM!

Stoick's ship collided with Alvin's, causing a frenzied uproar on deck. As some of the smoke cleared, Hiccup's eyes caught a flash of golden hair next to Alvin's hulky figure.

Astrid.

She and the marauder toppled backwards and hit the edge of the boat. When they did, Alvin's grip on Astrid loosened, and she quickly grabbed the opportunity to escape. She snatched a spear from beside her and whacked Alvin in the chest and gut, causing him to double over in pain.

Hiccup's heart swelled with admiration as he surveyed the scene. _That's my Astrid_, he thought proudly. _Show him not to mess with you._

Now it was Hiccup's turn to teach that jerk a lesson.

The boy swooped down low, speeding towards the deck of the ship. Toothless roared mightily as they approached. As soon as Alvin turned around, Hiccup and the Night Fury slammed headlong into the raider's face, knocking him to the ground.

THAT'S for touching my Astrid, the boy thought with immense satisfaction.

Below him, Astrid ran towards the bow of the ship.

"Astrid! Hop on!"

She jumped up and Toothless swept her up into the air, carrying her until they found Stormfly.

"Thanks," Astrid gasped breathlessly after she had leapt back into her saddle.

"Are you okay?" Hiccup asked worriedly. She'd had quite a bit of a fall. Plus, Alvin's grip certainly hadn't looked like it had been a very gentle one.

"I'm fine. Just a little banged-up."

Hiccup inwardly flinched at her choice of words, but he didn't press the issue furtherâ€"at least for the time being, anyway. They still had a battle to finish.

"NOW, HICCUP! BURN THE SHIP!" Stoick cried.

"Here we go, guys! Hit 'em with everything you've got!"

They dove for Alvin's ship and the dragons pummeled it with as many fire blasts as they could muster. The crew flung themselves overboard, screaming hysterically. Within minutes the entire boat was burning to a crisp and sinking into watery depths below.

Finally, it was over.

And thanks be to the gods, everyone was safe.

* * *

><p>He was concerned.<p>

He told himself that he had no reason to be, that Astrid Hofferson was perfectly capable of taking care of herself, but for some reason nothing could console him. Part of him supposed that seeing one's girlfriend get taken hostage twice in the span of twenty-four hours was a logical reason to be suffering from a sudden bout of paranoia. Any sane person who had witnessed that would be entirely justified in wanting to check up on said girlfriend, right? But still, she was Astrid after allâ€"

Wait, girlfriend? Where in the Hel had that come from?

Gods, he needed to get his head on straight.

And find Astrid. Just to make sure she was okay. Even though she probably was. Maybe.

"OW!"

Hiccup blinked in surprise as he collided with a figure in front of him.

"Oh! Ah! Sorryâ€"Astrid?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure that's my name. Did you forget or something?"

Hiccup's cheeks flushed scarlet as his gaze met that of the girl he had just been searching for. "I, uh, no. Of course not."

She smirked at him. "I was looking all over for you. Where've you been?"

Hiccup absent-mindedly lifted a hand to rub the back of his neck. "Ummâ€"|looking for you?"

"Huh. Guess we lucked out." She punched him lightly in the shoulder.

"AH!"

Hiccup's eyebrows shot upward as Astrid suddenly recoiled from the punch, wincing and rubbing her wrist.

"Are you okay?" The pitch of his voice rose a few notches.

"It's fine, Hiccup." She attempted to hide her discomfort with a straight face, but the boy could see past the façade in an instant.

"Let me look."

"Hiccup, I'm _fine_."

He frowned, inwardly willing himself not to go into panic mode. "No, you're not. You're still holding your wrist."

She quickly let go and lifted both hands in the air. "Well, now I'm not."

"Astrid," he said calmly, "just let me see."

"No!"

"_Astrid_â€"

She punched him again. And again, she immediately withdrew her hand, hissing in pain.

"Okay, that's it!" Before Astrid could protest again, Hiccup gently grabbed her afflicted hand and drew it towards him.

"Hiccup, reallyâ€"

He unwittingly gasped upon noticing the large green-and-purple bruise circling part of the length of her wrist. "Astrid! Whatâ€" His green eyes widened as they traveled up her arm, catching sight of even more dreadful splotches peppering the surface of her skin.

"It's from when I fell onto Alvin's ship, okay?" she finally grumbled, pulling her hand free of Hiccup's grasp. "Everything kind of hurts right now."

At that, Hiccup's eyes only grew wider. His paranoia began to set in again. "Whaâ€"what are you doing walking around? You should be resting or something!"

"Hiccup, I told you. _I. Am. Fine._ Just let it alone, okay?"

There were times when that certain glint in Astrid's eyes could dissuade him from a particular course of action. Much of the time, that glint was enough to frighten him. But not now. Oh no. He was going to do what he needed to do no matter how many punches he would have to endure for it.

"You're coming with me." He clasped her hand firmly and started pulling her in the direction of his house.

"Hiccup, this is ridiculous!" Astrid cried, hauling back against his grip. "Let me go! I'm _fine_"

"No, you'reâ€" "

"Yes Iâ€" "

"Will you stopâ€" "

"_You _stopâ€"aaah!"

Their tug-of-war abruptly ended when Astrid yanked a little too hard on Hiccup's hand. He came flying backwards and knocked into her, the momentum sending both of them toppling to the ground.

"OWW!"

"OOF!"

"Astrid, really, why can't you for once justâ€" _oh_."

He was on top of her.

The last time he'd been in a situation like this had been the snowball fight after the big blizzardâ€"except that time Astrid had ended up on top of him. Somehow, her pinning him down was less awkward than the other way around. Now, he couldn't seem to figure out what to do with himself. He thought he should let her up, but for some inexplicable reason he couldn't will his body to move.

"Hiccup."

"Iâ€|\uhhâ€|Iâ€|hi."

Her eyes were the color of the sea at the onset of a storm. He found this incredibly fascinating.

"_Hiccup._"

Why had he never noticed that about her eyes before? He'd spent practically his entire life admiring how beautiful her eyes were. He'd always assumed they were simply color of the sky, but now, being so close to them once again, he suddenly realized that their color had more depth to it than thatâ€"

"_HICCUP_!"

"Huhâ€|what?" She had a really cute nose, too. Was it weird to think someone's nose was cute? And now his gaze wouldn't stop flickering towards her lips. He was so _close_. His lips began tingling of their own accord.

"_Hiccup_. I. Can't. Breathe."

He glanced downward and realized that his knee was digging into Astrid's diaphragm.

"Oh gods! I'm sorryâ€|\uhâ€|" He hastily pushed himself off her and

stood up, offering her his hand.

She took it gratefully and pulled herself to her feet. There was a rosy bloom on each of her cheeks now.

"Sorry," Hiccup muttered. "I justâ€"

Astrid cut him off with a kiss on the corner of his mouth. He blinked, confused, and stared at her.

"Whatâ€"

"For trying to take care of me," she finished, her voice softer than he expected it to be. "I'm sorry I got upset. I'm okay, really. Just bruises. I'll live." She smiled reassuringly at him.

"Are you suâ€"

"I'm sure. I might not be able to punch you for a while, though."

Slowly, his lips curved into a sly grin. "Hmm, soâ€|now I can get away with stuff, huh?"

She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow at him. "Yeah, right."

"Oh, well," he sighed with a shrug. "It was worth a shot."

* * *

><p>AN: So basically I should just re-title this "In Which Astrid and Hiccup Get Super-Protective of Each Other Because Reasons." I apologize for that long re-hash of the battle from the actual episode - I did that for the sole purpose of showing Hiccup's and Astrid's thought processes during that scene, specifically pertaining to the whole protectiveness thing. For some reason I really love the idea of them almost freaking out over one or the other being in mortal danger. :P During my two? three? initial viewings of the episode, I didn't actually notice the part when Hiccup flies Toothless straight into Alvin's face, but during my latest re-watch, I caught it and was incredibly happy because it fit my protectiveness theme SO perfectly. IMO there was no reason for Hiccup to do that since Astrid had already escaped Alvin's clutches, unless he was going to be all "screw you for touching my almost-girlfriend." I don't know if the writers actually intended that. But it's my headcanon and I'm sticking with it BECAUSE HICCSTRID. Anyway...**

**The part about Astrid having nightmares about the time after Hiccup came back from fighting the Red Death - that's actually an idea that's been floating around in my head for about three years now. I initially wanted to write a oneshot about it, but I'm not sure if that'll happen. I do plan on the issue being brought up in later chapters of this, though. So stay tuned for that :)

**

Also...Alvin was WAY too much fun to write. I just felt like mentioning that. For some reason I thought he would be highly amused by Astrid and Hiccup trying to protect each other :P

****Anyway, thanks again for reading, and I'm sorry for boring you with this. Please don't forget to review! ****

7. How to Pick Your Dragon

Dear Readers,****

First off, I am SO SO SO SO SOSOSOSSOSOOOOO SORRY for the long wait! I had an extremely stressful/insanely busy/somewhat crappy week last week and I was so frazzled I literally (and I mean "literally" in the actual sense of the word) forgot about updating this. And then when I remembered, I had no time to write because I was so exhausted from work and school and family stuff that all I wanted to do was scream and/or sleep off the stress. I was VERY upset that I couldn't update until now - it's been driving me nuts the past week in addition to everything else going on in my life. Figures everything would pile up on my just before my birthday - yeah, it's my birthday today! YAY! So please don't be hard on me for leaving you hanging and for giving you a kind of underwhelming update after such a long time. I tried, I really did. Hopefully this came out as cute as I am envisioning it in my head, although it is short. I promise the next chapter will be LOADED with stuff. ****

Thanks again for sticking with this and I hope you still enjoy. ****

Best regards,****

_Pooka
>_**

*** * ***

><p>VII. How to Pick Your Dragon

*** * ***

><p>"So, how did the old 'honey and the hatchet' go?"<p>

The russet-haired dragon trainer slumped against the wall of his room and slid down until his bottom landed with a _thump _on the floor.

"Was it _that_ bad?" Astrid questioned, an expression of incredulity on her face.

Hiccup let his head flop into his palms.

"Hiccup, talk to me."

"Eummgrmpff," he whined.

"_Hiccup._"

The same sound emerged from his throat again as he vigorously shook his head.

Astrid crouched down to the boy's level and punched his arm.

Surprisingly, he didn't budge.

"I. Am. So. Done," he muttered, his voice muffled by his hands.

"Will you _please_ just look at me and _tell me what happened_?" the blonde begged, grabbing hold of Hiccup's shoulders and shaking them lightly.

Hiccup let out a strangled groan of frustration and roughly yanked his hands down the length of his face. "My _dad_!" he finally exclaimed. "My dad is _impossible_! IMPOSSIBLE!"

Astrid was slightly taken aback by her friend's sudden outburst, but she quickly stifled her surprise and gently laid a hand on Hiccup's forearm. "Okay, calm down. What did he say?" she asked evenly.

"He wants me to find him a dragon."

The blonde raised an eyebrow in spite of herself. "That's it?"

"Astrid," he whimpered, his hands flailing in the air, "you don't _understand_. _There's no way in Hel I'll find him another dragon now. He's dead set on a Night Fury and since, well, there's only, y'know, _one_ on this entire islandâ€¦well you do the math!"

Astrid sighed and shifted so she was sitting against the wall next to her fellow dragon trainer. "Hiccup, you can't know that for sure. Why don't you round everybody up at the academy later and have your dad take a look at all the dragons. Then he can decide which one he likes."

Hiccup grunted and thrust his fingers through his hair. "It's not just that," he added. "He doesn't _listen_ to me. I've been dropping hints for months that he should get a dragon but it was as if I hadn't said anything at all until _Gobber_ brought it up. And even if I do find him one and he gives Toothless back, there is absolutely no way he'll ever pay attention to anything I tell him about how to train it. With him it's justâ€¦in one ear and out the other!"

"Huh," Astrid murmured quietly. "That sounds familiar."

Hiccup turned and eyed his companion quizzically. "What?"

Astrid shook her head quickly as if that would somehow erase her previous statement from existence. "Nothing," she mumbled evasively. "Justâ€¦I thought ofâ€¦never mind. It doesn't matter." She took a deep breath and regained her composure. "What _does_ _matter_ is that your dad needs a dragon, _you_ _need_ _your_ _dragon_ back, and we need to do something about it."

"Astrid, did you not hear _anything_ _I_ just saiâ€¦"

"_Yes_, I did, Haddock, but you have to try something or else you're going to be stuck without a dragon for Thor knows howâ€¦why are you looking at me like that?"

Hiccup was gazing at Astrid with a rather odd expression on his face. "Did you just call me 'Haddock'?"

Slowly, Astrid's lips curled into a lopsided grin. "That _is _part of your name, isn't it?"

"Yeah but...what? Why would you call me that?" His brow was contorted into the strangest shape now.

The blonde poked the boy in the ribs. "Because I just felt like it," she replied, her eyes sparkling. "And it's funny."

For a moment Hiccup was silent, regarding Astrid with curiosity.

"What?"

"Youâ€|you are really weird sometimes, Astrid Hofferson."

She punched him in the shoulder.

"How did I know that was going to happen?" Hiccup chuckled, rubbing the spot where the girl had hit him.

"Do you feel a little less hopeless now?" Astrid asked as her grin widened.

"Barely."

"HICCUP!" Stoick's voice boomed from below.

"Oh, great, here we go," the boy muttered, rolling his eyes and pushing himself up off the floor.

"Don't worry," Astrid said as she stood up with him. "I'll find the others and tell them what's up. You just get your dad to the academy, okay?"

"Shouldn't be too hard. He thinks he owns my dragon now anyway."

She shook her head bemusedly and poked the boy in the ribs once more.

"Come on, _Haddock_, let's go."

* * *

><p>AN: Again, I apologize for how short this was. I had a completely different, longer idea for this but after I tried starting it, it just fizzled out. What I have here mostly just came from the top of my head - I had a vague concept for it but I didn't have much of a clue of where to go with that until I just was like, "Screw it; it will go somewhere" and wrote it. The "Haddock" bit at the end pretty much came out of nowhere. But I like it, even if it is kind of dumb. **

Anyway, there was some extremely slight foreshadowing here of what I will get into in the next chapter, although you probably won't be able to tell what that bit of foreshadowing was until you read the next installment (sorry, I'm mean, lol). And again, I promise the next chapter will have lots more stuff, so yay. Look forward to that :)

****Again, thanks as always for reading and reviewing - I really, really appreciate and look forward to the reviews! You guys are awesome!**
>

End
file.